



# TO WELCOME A NEW ARRIVAL

**Naming and welcoming ceremonies  
in non-religious families**





## **WELCOMING A NEW BABY**

A ceremony held shortly after a birth in the family is an occasion to celebrate the baby's safe arrival. At the same time it is an opportunity for the parents and others to state their commitment to the child's welfare. It brings friends and relatives together to greet the new member of the family with love and affection, and it expresses the importance of the event in a formal way.

Like all Humanist ceremonies a child's naming or welcoming ceremony is specially composed for the occasion, and the form it takes will vary, following the wishes of the parents. Sometimes other children in the family will be included in the ceremony. Sometimes several babies from a group of friends can be welcomed together. When the child is adopted, the wording will be rather different and the occasion may be even more special.



## **WHY NOT A CHRISTENING?**

Those for whom religion is an important part of life will name the new child according to the practice of their particular faith. For Humanists, and those who do not hold any religious belief, a christening service would be inappropriate. In particular, the appointment of Christian godparents to care for the child's religious upbringing would be unacceptable.



## **WHY A CEREMONY AT ALL?**

Certainly the idea of holding a special ceremony for a new child appeals to some parents more than to others. There are those who feel we are aping the religions or feel uncomfortable with ritual of this kind. Others, however, think that Christians and others have no special claim to the 'rites of passage' which, for them, fulfil a human need that has been there since the dawn of humanity.



## **WHO ARE HUMANISTS?**

Humanism continues a tradition which has existed for over 2,500 years, and which flourishes today in many countries.

Humanists believe that this life is what matters — and the welfare of present and future generations — since they do not believe in a life after death nor divine revelation. They believe that we have evolved as moral beings, and that morality is an integral part of human nature.

One of our activities in the Humanist movement is to help people arrange non-religious ceremonies to mark the main milestones in their lives, namely birth, marriage and death.



## **HUMANIST ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN**

Humanists share many of the ideals held by people with liberal religious views. But there is a distinctly Humanist approach to many aspects of parenting. For example, Humanists would tend to favour support and encouragement rather than authoritarianism; self discipline and mutual respect rather than too many rules and regulations; 'good' behaviour learnt by example rather than by instruction; and independence of mind rather than blind acceptance of others' views.

So the aspirations that Humanist parents express at a naming ceremony are likely to reflect this kind of approach. The parents can also state in their own words their commitment to the new baby and their acceptance of responsibility for the child's wellbeing during the years to maturity. At the ceremony, these words are usually spoken among close family and friends, who have particular concern and affection for the parents, for other children they may have, and for the new arrival.





## **WHAT ABOUT 'GODPARENTS'?**

In a Christening service the godparents make promises on behalf of the infant and undertake to see that he or she is brought up in the Christian faith. In a Humanist ceremony there is no undertaking to supervise the child's upbringing in a particular faith.

However many Humanists feel that the idea of having one or two friends to act as 'supporting adults' or 'mentors' to their new child is a good one.

The role of these friends is twofold: they can take a special interest in the child's development and give support to the parents; and they can be there as a refuge for the child outside the immediate family circle.

It is a good idea to ask someone whom you know likes children and young people, who is moderately young and who does not live too far away.



## **WHERE CAN WE HOLD THE CEREMONY?**

The most common venue seems to be the child's own home, with the garden an option if the ceremony takes place on a warm, sunny day.

If a lot of people are invited and your own home or garden is not suitable, friends or relations will usually be glad to host the event.



## **CAN WE CONDUCT THE CEREMONY OURSELVES?**

Unlike a funeral or wedding, a naming ceremony is often arranged and conducted by a close friend or member of the family. When the parents want to keep the occasion very simple, they sometimes decide to say a few words themselves.

If they prefer something a little more formal, a Humanist will be glad to act as Celebrant for you. There will normally be a small fee, and this should be negotiated beforehand.



## A POSSIBLE READING:

"The coming of a child into the family circle widens its dimension far beyond the simple addition of another member.

It brings the miracle of a new personality struggling for its own fulfilment. Therefore, it is quite natural for us to be thrilled at the sight of new births.

However, as the years pass, it is too easy to take our children for granted. Whatever their ages they deserve the tender love and firm guidance which only we, as parents, teachers and friends can give.

Moreover, these children have a right to a faith in themselves, in the story of humankind, in their particular heritage, and in the vast universe-home which is theirs.

It is to symbolise these possibilities and responsibilities that we have come to this ceremony."

From a selection by David H. MacPherson\*



\* (with acknowledgment to the Unitarian Universalist Association and their anthology, 'Great Occasions.')

Your Humanist Contact is:

Alternatively, you can ring  
Coordinator for Ceremonies

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HELPLINE 0990 168122  
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ENQUIRES 0171 430 0908  
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The BHA publishes a booklet giving practical advice for anyone wanting to arrange a naming or welcoming ceremony that is non-religious or Humanist. It is called 'New Arrivals' and contains several sample ceremonies, a selection of suitable prose and verse, and many practical suggestions. It costs £3.00, plus 50p postage, and is available from:



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